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Mr. Bryan May

Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

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● (1615)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Bryan May (Cambridge, Lib.)): Good afternoon, everybody.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Thursday, November 9, 2017, the committee is resuming its study of experiential learning and pathways to employment for Canadian youth.

Today the committee will hear from witnesses on the subject of entrepreneurship. We have a witness via video conference from Vancouver, British Columbia, Mr. Duncan Sinclair.

I understand, sir, that you have a bit of a time crunch, so I'm going to go off script a little bit here, allow you to do your opening comments, and give you the floor now. Then I will introduce our other guests after you have completed. The next seven minutes are all yours, sir.

Mr. Duncan Sinclair (Incoming Chair of the Board, Deloitte): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

This video conferencing facility has another client booked in for the bottom of the hour here at 4:30 p.m. your time. I look forward to the opportunity of having a few moments with all of you, and I thank you for that.

As Canada's leading professional services firm, Deloitte takes great pride and responsibility in contributing our perspectives on the issues that matter to our country and affect the Canadian business community.

We speak regularly with business and government leaders from across the country about their vision for the future of our country. These conversations have convinced us that while Canada has made great strides in achieving a high quality of life over the last 151 years, as we look ahead, Canada should be in a class of its own, not one of the best, but the best place to live and work in the world.

Our recent report "Bold bets for our country" explores the pivotal role that bold choices and actions will play in deciding our future. It is a call to action for leaders across the nation, whether they are in business, government, or academia, to make bold and deliberate choices in three main areas, to put Canada on the path for future success.

First, to dominate the global stage, we need to focus investment and unite as a country behind areas of competitive advantage to create truly global champions.

Second, as our countries turn inward, we need to dramatically accelerate our global engagement and leverage our reputation as a welcoming, open, and inclusive society, to attract the best and brightest people and open new markets for Canadian goods, services, and ideas.

Third and most relevant for our discussion today, given the committee's focus on exploring experiential pathways to learning, Canada has the potential to become a global education powerhouse. To get there, we need to disrupt the education status quo.

To equip our graduates with the skills needed for a business- and technology-driven economy in knowledge areas, both government and business need to make fundamental changes to how we educate, train, and retrain our workforce.

First, we believe we can start by taking concrete steps to eliminate the distinction between pre- and post-career training, and reimagine Canada's education system with a focus on lifelong learning.

As Canada's workforce ages and technology continues to evolve, workers' skills risk becoming fundamentally misaligned with job markets, making the adaptation to new work increasingly important.

Doubling down on investments in the status quo will not, in our view, prepare Canadians for the future of work. We need a fundamentally new approach that embraces new education practices and models focused on critical thinking, practical application of skills, and diversity of learning, as well as direct links to the world outside the classroom.

After years of declining business investment in employee training, many organizations have recognized the importance and imperative of the continuous development of their people. For example, in my own firm, we have invested significantly in lifelong learning with a centre called Deloitte University North. It's a learning and leadership development centre where we offer a curated, experiential learning program that gives our people the opportunity to learn and develop capabilities throughout their career, to the benefit of us all.

Second, to transform Canada into a home for the world's best and most innovative learning organizations, global powerhouses for workforce retraining and reskilling, we need to develop new approaches that provide maximum flexibility in the options available to Canadians when obtaining accreditation.

Governments and businesses need to work together to expand experiential learning models such as apprenticeships for skilled trades, articling for law, and residencies for medicine, and to broaden that to a more comprehensive range of professions.

We must empower a wider range of organizations to provide education and skills training accreditation to meet growing demand, including through online learning platforms and corporate training programs that better reflect the many ways that knowledge, skills, and capabilities are acquired today.

The world's greatest knowledge-based economies are already moving in this direction. I take for example the opportunities that have been created in Singapore through the introduction of their SkillsFuture Credit in 2015, providing all of their citizens over the age of 25 with a credit of 500 Singapore dollars that could be used to access education and training opportunities supplied by a series of approved providers, not just traditional educational institutions but a wide variety of emerging institutions such as Coursera and the Khan Academy.

In 2016, the first year of this program had more than 126,000 people make use of the program to access 18,000 approved course offerings by more than 700 unique training providers. I mention this example not to suggest that we copy exactly what Singapore has done, noting we need to situate next steps for new skills investment for Canadians within our own context.

● (1620)

However, we have an opportunity with the refresh of the youth employment strategy to be creative in looking at ways to have this done, and done as well for us as it has been done in other jurisdictions.

Finally, we need to find ways to leverage technology to forge a new relationship between job seekers, educational organizations, and businesses that streamlines the processes in place to search, apply for, and obtain learning and work.

We've seen a great early success story with this type of technological innovation in a company called Riipen. Riipen is a start-up that was created in 2014 by two graduates from the University of Victoria, which has continued to grow and expand in providing a unique learning opportunity for students while in university and beyond.

This "LinkedIn for students" has been a win-win for students looking for real-world experience, for educators looking to engage with experiential learning and establish industry involvement in their classrooms, and for employers looking to get access to emerging talent with an assurance that the graduates can and will perform.

To date, there have been a total of 24,000 students from 130 academic institutions who have received an experience through Riipen's platform, having been connected with over 2,600 employers.

As you prepare your report for this study, I would encourage you to consider how the Riipen model can be scaled and applied to improve youth employment outcomes on a larger scale and, more importantly, all of the opportunities for us as Canadian employers and Canadian business to take the courage to be first customer for all of the other innovative and creative learning platforms that will continue to be evolving within the Canadian context.

In an increasingly complex and fast-paced world, we must think strategically about the challenges and opportunities we face as a country and the actions we need to take to move us, over the next 25 years, toward our desired future.

New levels of collaboration and decision-making among our governments, business communities, educational institutions, and citizens are critical to unleashing the potential to make Canada a true world leader.

We're confident that in 25 years Canada will be a dynamic, growing country; the best place to live and work in the world; and a land of opportunity, prosperity, and inclusion for all people—if we're willing to take the bold choices now to get us there.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity of presenting to you today.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Sinclair.

Now, for the record, I'll introduce the rest of our guests here.

Witnesses are: from Engineers Canada, Annette Bergeron, president; from Junior Achievement Canada, Scott Hillier, president and chief executive officer; from Shopify Inc., Andrea Ross, senior lead, computing education; and from Urban Worker Project, Andrew Cash, co-founder and president.

Welcome to all of you.

We'll start again here with opening remarks Engineers Canada, Annette Bergeron, president, for seven minutes, please.

Ms. Annette Bergeron (President, Engineers Canada): Thank you for the opportunity to appear here today.

I'm very pleased to discuss Engineers Canada's stance on experiential learning and pathways to employment for Canadian youth. Engineers Canada's testimony today pertains directly to the need for mandatory and paid co-operative post-secondary engineering programs to be implemented in institutions where they do not currently exist.

Engineers Canada is the national organization that represents the 12 provincial and territorial associations that regulate the practice of engineering in Canada and license approximately 290,000 members of the engineering profession.

Co-operative learning opportunities facilitate workforce recruitment and allow employers to train students in areas where there are evident skill shortages. Engineering co-op placements are crucial in developing an engineering student's professional network, while simultaneously providing opportunities to gain relevant work experience, and guiding younger Canadians through the transition between post-secondary education and the engineering workforce.

Mr. Chair, Canada's engineering profession requires knowledgeable and innovative engineering leaders to improve aging infrastructure and promote clean technology.

With an unemployment rate of 11% for Canadian youth between the ages of 15 and 24, paid engineering co-op programs at the post-secondary level are a mechanism to effectively address youth unemployment. These programs should be implemented into all post-secondary institutions where they do not currently exist, to guide Canadian youth to meaningful employment after graduation. Of the 24 post-secondary institutions in Canada that offer an engineering co-op program, only five offer a mandatory engineering co-op placement.

For example, my daughter is currently enrolled in a mandatory engineering co-op program at McGill University. My stepson graduated from a mandatory engineering co-op degree from Waterloo university. He is currently practising engineering right here in Ottawa. At Queen's University, where I used to teach, they offer an optional 12-month internship engineering degree. Those are just three examples.

The perceived benefits for engineering students who participate in paid co-op programs are vast. Many of these benefits include positive employment rates following graduation, lower levels of student debt, and higher workforce earnings following graduation.

There are also many benefits for employers.

Paid engineering co-op placements are crucial in easing the economic burden that Canadian youth may face when entering the labour market. Moreover, the Canadian youth employment strategy must be adjusted to promote career-focused engineering programs that are affiliated with federal departments and agencies. Currently, the strategy has a large focus on connecting youth to science and technology programs, leaving engineering initiatives all but forgotten. A program stream that connects a federal department or agency to a youth-focused engineering program is required to engage and attract youth to an engineering education, and the profession.

The federal government should provide wage subsidies for post-secondary engineering co-op programs. Financial incentives have a large role in influencing employers' likelihood in hiring students who participate in co-op education. By allocating wage subsidies for co-op placements, Canadian engineering employers will learn more about the co-op engineering programs and benefit from innovative perspectives from the students they train.

Engineering students who are better prepared to enter the profession will contribute greatly to Canada's economic growth and innovative agenda.

A survey put out by the Canadian Federation of Engineering Students, with over 1,700 engineering student respondents from across Canada, found that competition from other students and lack of quality job opportunities were the two biggest concerns of their engineering programs. This suggests that both the quantity and the quality of engineering internships available to students are not adequate for current demands. Thus, greater government support for initiatives with the federal departments and wage subsidies for employers would allow students to take advantage of internship programs that already exist.

● (1625)

The federal government must support engineering bridging programs for international students who have attained an engineering degree from an accredited post-secondary program. Bridging programs that are specific to engineering should be supported to provide international students with information about the pathway to licensure, understanding of Canadian engineering workplace culture, valuable references for job searching, and access to local engineering work experiences.

Nova Scotia has a great engineering work-based competency assessment program and bridging program that offers international students a 12-week opportunity to demonstrate their engineering competencies and to identify skill gaps with a Nova Scotian engineering employer. An honorarium is given following the 12-week placement. This is a great provincial program that allows international students to show their qualifications to a potential employer while submitting their work experience record to Engineers Nova Scotia. This program may be considered towards the individual's one year of North American experience that is required for licensure. By developing an engineering bridging program across Canada, internationally educated youth can successfully transition into the Canadian labour market.

Finally, information on the impacts that engineering co-op placements have on Canada's workforce and national economy need to be readily available for policy-makers, industries, students, and educational institutions. Data sources in Canada have significant shortcomings that include their relatively short-term nature when referring to critical labour market information such as youth unemployment rates following post-secondary education.

Having a national database on the employment rates of post-secondary engineering students following a co-op program is critical to addressing a successful youth transition into the Canadian workforce. It would allow stakeholders to track the growth of co-op placements in Canada while simultaneously evaluating the success of student co-op participation.

Mr. Chair, thank you for allowing Engineers Canada to present to the committee today on this important issue.

● (1630)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

The bells are ringing, so I have to ask for unanimous consent for us to continue through the bells up until about 15 minutes before the vote.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you.

Then we're going to Mr. Scott Hillier from Junior Achievement Canada.

You have seven minutes, please.

Mr. Scott Hillier (President and Chief Executive Officer, Junior Achievement Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am pleased to be here to share a perspective on experiential learning and pathways to employment for Canadian youth, specifically in the area of entrepreneurship.

Junior achievement, or JA as we refer to it, has a long history in entrepreneurial education, so I thank you for including our organization in this study.

For those not familiar with JA, it started in 1919 in the United States and expanded to Canada in 1955. It's now in 120 countries, with over 10 million students participating in a JA program each year somewhere around the globe.

In Canada, JA is a pan-Canadian resource available to school systems. We work with teachers, corporations, and volunteers coordinated by our 16 JA charter offices across the country. Currently we are reaching about 250,000 Canadian youth, grades 3 through 12, each year—a little different context than what we've heard previously.

JA is a registered charity. We raise approximately $20 million a year to provide our programs free of charge, whether that be to schools, students, or parents. About 5% of that funding is currently coming from a level of government.

Most people are familiar with our flagship program, called "company program", where the students are put into teams. They build and run a business for about four months. They go through a full life cycle of building a business: they capitalize; elect their officers; come up with a business plan; source the raw materials; produce the product; sell it; liquidate; and do a shareholder report, all in four months. It's quite an intensive entrepreneurial learning experience for them.

In some provinces, that particular program has been approved to earn high school credits, serving as work experience for students.

JA has been expanding that particular program, which has now been customized both for indigenous youth and for students focused on careers in trades and fine arts.

A key question we can ask about any entrepreneurial learning program is, does it create entrepreneurs?

The Boston Consulting Group partnered with JA a number of years ago to answer that question in an 18-month study of almost 2,000 JA alumni, who are now working adults; 70% felt that JA had a significant impact on their decision to complete high school and get a post-secondary education. Another 70% felt it had a significant impact on their desire to become an entrepreneur. And based on actual results, graduates were 50% more likely to start their own business.

A similar study was done on JA in Sweden—as I mentioned, JA is a global organization—by a different group, but with similar results. Their study revealed that almost one out of every four JA graduates started a business. Recognizing the economic impact of this, the Swedish government promoted entrepreneurial education across the entire school system, and JA became a regular component of high school education. Because of this support, 30,000 high school students participate in the JA company program in Sweden annually, compared with only 8,000 in Canada, which is a 15-times greater reach per capita. So we have some work to do there.

This speaks to our first recommendation, that Canada should provide more hands-on entrepreneurial learning experiences before our youth get into post-secondary education.

The World Economic Forum recently reported that two-thirds of youth entering school will eventually work in a job that doesn't yet exist. Experts are saying that the pace and scope of change anticipated in the coming years will challenge every industry. A question many are asking is, are our youth adequately prepared for the future of jobs?

McKinsey & Company did a study recently titled "Youth in transition", and reported that 83% of Canadian educators felt that youth were well prepared for the future workforce, yet only 34% of employers agreed with that statement.

In a large Deloitte study, only one out of four C-suite executives believed their companies had the right workforce composition and skill sets needed to succeed in the future.

Experiential learning to gain entrepreneurial skills provides those essential skills that have meaningful impacts. Again from the Boston Consulting Group report, compared with their peers, we learned that working adults who are JA alumni earn 50% more; are three times more likely to spend less and save more; and are 20% less likely to become unemployed or need social assistance.

● (1635)

In total, the BCG group calculated that the JA program provides $45 in societal gains for every $1 invested. With this impact, we know JA is a proven product, and we offer that it is positioned well to do more to help youth transition successfully to the workforce going forward.

Given our perspective on the value of experiential learning for developing entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial skills, our recommendations to this committee would be the following:

First, support financially and promote through education ministries more entrepreneurial learning opportunities for youth in younger years, before they become focused on post-secondary or enter the workforce. Youth will leverage those skills immediately.

Second, inspire from within. Help connect the evolving entrepreneurial ecosystem in Canada with high school programs to inspire and educate today's youth.

Third, help educate the parents and teachers to understand entrepreneurship and the employment value of entrepreneurial skills.

Finally, celebrate and recognize young entrepreneurial leaders via conferences and awards.

These recommendations are designed to achieve two broader goals.

The first one is to increase the number of youth who have current and relevant employability skills, regardless of their employment path. Creative thinking, risk-taking, resiliency, and adaptability with good teamwork and communication skills are just a few.

The second one is to increase the number of people in Canada's entrepreneurial pool by supporting the organizations that serve as feeder systems.

In closing, I want to thank the chair and committee for this opportunity to participate in this important discussion. We welcome any questions.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hillier.

We have about five more minutes. We're going to go to Andrea Ross from Shopify, the senior lead, computing education.

Ms. Andrea Ross (Senior Lead, Computing Education, Shopify Inc.): Thank you, Mr. Chair and honourable committee members. I'm very grateful for the opportunity to speak with you today about dev degree. Dev degree is Shopify's work-integrated learning program.

For those of you unfamiliar with Shopify, we are a multi-channel commerce platform. Entrepreneurs use our software to set up, design, and manage their stores, their businesses. This includes online stores and brick-and-mortar locations. Over 600,000 businesses in more than 175 countries rely on Shopify's technology to power their businesses.

We are a fiercely proud Canadian company. Our headquarters are just a few blocks away from us here in Ottawa. We have two offices in Toronto, two in Kitchener-Waterloo, one in Montreal, and one in San Francisco. We employ over 3,000 people who come to work every day hungry to make commerce better for everyone, everywhere.

In 2016, Shopify partnered with Carleton University to launch a revolutionary work-integrated learning program called dev degree. Dev degree was created to solve systemic issues with how people enter the tech industry. Shopify's dev degree features a globally recognized and accredited computer science degree with 4,500 hours of hands-on work experience, a competitive salary, paid tuition, and seven weeks of annual leave. Just for reference, 4,500 hours of work experience is roughly nine times the hours in a traditional co-op program. Each graduating dev degree student will have received at least $160,000 in financial support.

Obtaining a degree in computer science or software engineering is a typical path to becoming a software developer. These degrees often take four to five years to complete, sometimes longer. The large-scale complex problems that face software developers in the workplace cannot be taught easily in academia. Also, keeping pace and teaching industry-current technologies is extremely challenging for academia.

There's really no substitute for hands-on learning by doing. Without this, it can take an additional six months to two years for a new graduate to reach productivity. With dev degree, the amazing thing that we're seeing is meaningful contributions from the students in their second year in the program. This is three years earlier than the traditional model, which is remarkable.

Just while we're talking about it, the co-op model is 60 years old. There are some challenges with it, especially in modern times. Typical computer science co-op placements are approximately four months. Realistically, this is nowhere near enough time to learn the necessary tools, technologies, and practices required to have a meaningful impact. When students do co-op placements at different companies, they start from scratch each time. The end result is that people struggle to build depth in their skills and work on more substantial problems. I think many of us have experienced this.

University students are often away from home for the first time. University can be quite different from their experiences so far. Cohorts of students at the university are often very large. Professors struggle to get to know the students personally. It's no surprise that students often struggle. Typically 30% to 40% of computer science students drop out between the first and second years of the program.

Students in dev degree are provided two mentors during their time in the dev degree program: a life-at-Shopify mentor, when they are working at Shopify, who is a trusted friend and guide; and a technical mentor who guides them in their daily work. The dev degree students also find tremendous support from each other, the cohort of students in the program with them. What's really neat to watch is that they call one another family, and this support for one another is amazing to behold.

All of these issues that I've talked about compound and contribute to talent shortage for Canadian tech companies. Tech companies are powered by creativity and solving problems that have never been seen before. We need these minds to be working on these problems.

In the program, it has been common for teams to ask to keep their student even in their second year. Nevertheless, we rotate them through different teams every eight months to develop a diverse set of skills such as web, mobile, security, data, and other in-demand technologies.

A typical week for a dev degree student involves three to four classes on campus with our university partners and 25 hours of working with teams at Shopify. By the time they graduate, they receive 4,500 hours of hands-on work experience. This allows the students to contribute to product development at Shopify even before they graduate and to hone their craft by the time they graduate.

There's a significant diversity gap in the technology ecosystem in Canada and around the world. Data shows that only 12% of software development positions in our industry are held by women. It's even lower for indigenous and LGBTQ+ Canadians. Our merchants are quite diverse, representing very similar proportions in society. As a result, a diverse team of employees helps us understand them and meet their needs.

● (1640)

The Chair: Thank you very much. We will have to stop there.

We'll suspend. We'll go vote. We'll come right back and you will be able to finish up your statement.

● (1640)

(Pause)

● (1715)

The Chair: We are back.

The first two minutes, as promised, go to Ms. Andrea Ross.

Ms. Andrea Ross: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I was starting to say we have 24 students in the dev degree program currently, 50% men and 50% women, so 12 women and 12 men. I'm also thrilled to say that 25% of the students are mature students, meaning they've been out in the workforce and have come back and are reskilling, which is fantastic. And 20% identify as LGBTQ+, which is great. We're also hiring 20 more students in September.

Our main recommendation today is twofold. One is to prioritize and invest in programs that level the playing field in teaching technology to groups that are typically excluded from technology. Two is to support work-integrated learning programs like the Shopify one that provide a truly integrated learning experience for students concurrent with their university or college studies.

The first point leads into the second: enabling kids, teens, and under-represented groups with technology education. By doing this we are growing the available talent in Canada. All of this feeds into a better educated, more knowledgeable, and more diverse workforce for the future of Canada.

I have one more thing just in concluding. This fall we'll be announcing a new university partner for our dev degree program in Toronto. Our new university partner's senate recently voted unanimously that the dev degree model is excellent and should come to their university. This is amazing. This senate body is a diverse body of academics that struggles to agree on anything, so having them agree that dev degree is excellent and belongs at that university is a powerful validation and encouragement of our work. It is our hope to expand the program across the country to ensure Canada is a world leader in the development of highly skilled, job-ready computer engineering graduates.

Thank you very much for your time.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now, for the final seven minutes of opening remarks we have, from Urban Worker Project, Andrew Cash, co-founder and president.

Mr. Andrew Cash (Co-Founder and President, Urban Worker Project): Thank you, Chair, and through you to the committee, thank you for the opportunity to be here and to speak. It's a great honour to be here.

The Urban Worker Project is a national non-profit I co-founded two years ago to raise the issues and the voices of those working outside of an employer-employee relationship. That is, freelance, on contract, solo, self-employed, contingent, temp, casual, and part-time workers, as well as those working for free.

[*Translation*]

That represents the majority of jobs in the North American economy and, aside from the type of work, the required skills and the pay scale, those jobs have a number of things in common: no pension plan, no social benefits, no job security, no rights or protection in the workplace, and no parental, disability or sick leave. There are also legal actions for not being paid or for any poor treatment by the client employer.

[*English*]

According to Deloitte's 2017 report entitled "Global Human Capital Trends", and I quote: 90% of jobs created in Canada in 2015 and 2016 were independent and paid on average 30% less than corresponding permanent positions. In the U.S. 94% of net job growth between 2005 and 2015 came from alternative arrangements and Canada's contingent workforce now accounts for about one-third of all jobs.

So we're talking about roughly six million Canadians working outside of the typical employer-employee relationship and those numbers are trending upwards.

While our social safety net and labour laws are predicated on the standard 40-hour-a-week, stable, full-time job, the majority of new jobs look a lot different. When you're outside the standard employment model, it also means you're outside a workplace culture and that means you don't have access to mentors and you don't have access to skills upgrades, career guidance, or counselling. It means your career trajectory may often look linear as you juggle several short-term gigs at the same time and often in quite different fields.

For the purposes of this study, it is vital to acknowledge two things. These are, one, while the nature of work is fundamentally changing, it's already changed for hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of Canadian workers; and, two, the challenge before us isn't only how do you train workers to meet current and future job demands, but how do we train young people to meet the challenge of not having a job, really, at all in the conventional sense that we have come to understand what work is?

● (1720)

[*Translation*]

When they don't have a decent full-time job, young people must be resilient, ingenious and creative in order to earn a good living. To do that, they need a broader and more diversified set of skills and experiences to have the best possible chance to survive and benefit from the new economy. I don't know whether that training can now be acquired in school—I am not an expert on that—but it is definitely difficult to acquire after graduation.

That is why Urban Worker Project, or UWP, has organized knowledge sharing meetings in Toronto and Vancouver to connect independent and freelance workers with experts—people who have succeeded in the field. Workshops at those meetings focus on things such as planning a budget, searching for funding, ways to get paid on time, use of marketing in social media, networking, and tax and financial planning. Several hundred people have attended those meetings and, for many of them, it was the very first affordable skills development workshop they participated in.

So it is crucial for independent workers to have easy access to skills development. Recently, the UWP joined forces with 100 students from Ryerson University, in Toronto, to carry out a pilot project on workplace issues. In addition to their school work, the vast majority have jobs with a work week of over 35 hours. Some have several part-time jobs, others work at night and many have family responsibilities. Those students mostly come from immigrant families and travel long distances from home to the Ryerson campus.

Everyone really wants to acquire the necessary skills to find a good job, but as student workers, they are under considerable pressure because they have to juggle school and work.

[*English*]

It is our view that unpaid co-op placements and internships only exacerbate systemic inequality and we should be looking at ways to replace them altogether with paid training positions.

One other point I would like to make here is that we have to find a better way to count who is doing what in the labour market. Just tracking the monthly numbers of jobs lost and gained in any particular sector suggests that somehow one job is equal to another, but there is a vast difference between a full-time job in the public sector or at an auto plant and a minimum-wage temp job. It is our view that Canada needs a jobs quality index that takes into consideration the quality of the jobs created and lost, not just the quantity. For example, what do the jobs we've lost or gained pay; do they come with a pension, benefits, job security, union protection, or are they short-term contracts or low-wage work; is it necessary to commute long distances to these jobs; are they green jobs?

Developing a jobs quality index could give us a much clearer understanding of what is happening in the labour market and what its needs are. If we are only focused on the traditional employer-employee job, then we run the risk of missing the opportunity to help our young people confront the new challenges of shouldering all the responsibilities formerly shared with an employer, in an economy that's offering fewer and fewer full-time jobs.

Thanks.

● (1725)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Cash.

We are going to start with questions. Given how much time we have left, we're going to do one round of five minutes each.

Ms. Sansoucy, will that be sufficient, or do you still want what we talked about earlier.

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): I will see. Can I ask?

The Chair: Certainly.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: If we don't have time to ask all of our questions, could we ask our witnesses to send their written answers to the clerk? We could see whether we can go through our questions during this first round.

[*English*]

The Chair: Certainly. We're good with that.

First up is Mr. Blaney for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Before I yield the floor to my colleague, I would like to welcome our witnesses and ask them to forgive us for the spring interruptions we are experiencing as we approach the end of this session. All hell has broken loose. We thank you for your testimony, which our analysts have been able to take into consideration.

Mr. Cash, you know about this. You have been on this side of the fence in the past. Welcome to the witness side.

Mr. Andrew Cash: Thank you.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Thank you, as well, for telling us about the precarious situation of young entrepreneurs. I was an entrepreneur for a few years. I know that guidance is lacking once a business is launched. So what you are doing is really worthwhile.

I will turn to Ms. Bergeron, since her daughter is an engineering student at McGill University. You are right. I went through the co-op program, from which we come out debt-free. I finished in December, and I started at the University of Sherbrooke in January . However, I want to bring up two elements related to my profession that are not really related to learning through experience.

First, there really aren't enough women in engineering. They still account for only 20% of engineers. That is not enough.

I have another question that you may not need to answer today. How can we ensure that immigrants can use their engineering expertise in our society? Could learning through experience be a way to integrate them into their profession? We want engineers to work in their field, such as information technology and artificial intelligence, instead of driving a taxi. That is my question for you. Any suggestions you may have would be welcome.

I will then yield the floor to my colleague, Ms. Falk.

[*English*]

She can ask some further questions. Thank you.

Ms. Annette Bergeron: There are some good examples of bridging programs. Some of them I mentioned in my testimony remarks. We're happy to provide some more information to you, but I think bridging programs help direct international engineering graduates on the path to licensure in Canada to help gain that one-year requirement of North American experience, which is usually the biggest stumbling block. I think we should focus on the bridging programs that are working, and every province has their own bridging programs.

One of our recommendations in our written submission is, if we're going to pursue, we'd like to pursue and expand co-op experience to make that also available to international engineering graduates who have already graduated to help them get towards that four years of work experience towards their licence and to meet that one year of North American experience requirement for their licence.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mrs. Falk.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Thank you all for being here today.

I have a question for Mr. Hillier.

You mentioned that the organization Junior Achievement is a non-profit organization. You mentioned that your organization runs on donations, and that they are received from government. Which orders of government invest in the organization?

● (1730)

Mr. Scott Hillier: It can be any level of government. Usually it's provincial because, obviously, the education programs that we're providing are aligned with the local provincial education ministry. One of the largest, though, is the innovation entrepreneurship ministry in British Columbia. They provide probably half of the total for the whole country by comparison. Usually the donations are from —

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: And that's from the $20 million, so half of that. Is that what you're referring to?

Mr. Scott Hillier: Of the $20 million, about 5% is done by government.

That's roughly $1 million across the whole country, across all levels of government, for the 16 charters and the national office, but about half of that, so about $500,000, is from one ministry in British Columbia.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Then where do you get the rest of the monies? Is it from private donors?

Mr. Scott Hillier: Corporations really see themselves as the beneficiary of our work. They want to invest in tomorrow's workforce, and they're very generous in Canada. They have active and very well-engaged corporate social responsibility programs, and they actively volunteer but also donate to JAC"s programs. A good percentage of our funding comes from corporations, but also individuals and foundations, etc.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Okay. Thank you very much.

The Chair: MP Long, please, for five minutes.

Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.): Thank you to our presenters. I'm going to be sharing my time with MP Ruimy.

My first question is for Mr. Hillier.

We've heard a lot of testimony recently about people advocating for the expansion of the Canada summer jobs program into the Canada youth jobs program. That would help young people who cannot afford to take on unpaid internships break into fields in which previous experience in that particular field is essential as a prerequisite for paid employment. Can you give me your opinion? In your view, would a Canada youth jobs program help more young people, and particularly those from historically marginalized groups, and those living in poverty, break into the business world and learn the skills they need in order to become a successful entrepreneur, engineer, or technology developer?

Then I would like to ask Mr. Cash the same question.

Mr. Scott Hillier: Of course, we would support anything that provides an opportunity for today's youth. For the at-risk and marginalized youth, I think, the challenge is accessing them. It's finding out where they are and having that network of communication so that they can be identified and supported. They face other challenges beyond just regular employment and funding opportunities, whether it be self-employment opportunities.... Yes, we think it's a great thing to continue; however, there are other opportunities, avenues, and partnerships that should be explored that help access and actually tighten the reach to those individuals who are at risk, are marginalized, and wouldn't traditionally find access to those programs as other students may.

Mr. Wayne Long: Okay.

Mr. Cash.

Mr. Andrew Cash: For clarification, are you asking about an expansion of the Canada summer jobs program specifically?

Mr. Wayne Long: Yes. It would be a kind of hybrid, if you will.

Mr. Andrew Cash: A hybrid that isn't just located during the summer months but could potentially—

Mr. Wayne Long: Right. It would extend into the fall.

Mr. Andrew Cash: Yes, in fact, I think that's one of the shortcomings of the Canada summer jobs program. It's a great program for giving young people an experience in the jobs world but it's a limited time frame.

Mr. Wayne Long: Right.

Mr. Andrew Cash: Although I much agree with my colleague here, especially for young people from immigrant communities, for example, I think they are facing all sorts of complicated barriers.

Access to the experience is important, but that access has to be coupled with other resources, and we need to think about this in a much more holistic way. We have to be thinking about access to affordable housing, public transportation, and those kinds of pillars that really make a difference for young people.

Mr. Wayne Long: Okay, thank you very much.

I'll go over to MP Ruimy.

Mr. Dan Ruimy (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, Lib.): Thank you very much.

We're going to go quickly. Ms. Ross, you were talking about your program and you said there were how many currently in the program?

Ms. Andrea Ross: There are 24.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: Twenty-four. You said next year it's going to go up to...?

Ms. Andrea Ross: In September we're bringing on 20 more, so it will be up to 44.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: What is the criteria for that?

Ms. Andrea Ross: There is a step process. They have to be accepted at the university, of course. Then they are also accepted at Shopify. We have a screening process where we start out separating all kinds of things that identify age, sex, culture, religion. We actually review purely on the merit of their answers. What also is quite innovative in terms of what we're doing is that we're not testing privilege. We're not testing if they have had experience with this particular programming language or this particular tool. We actually are doing cognitive testing. Can they think through a problem? We have no time limit. We are basically saying, "These are the problems, take your time, and think your way through." We use that to inform us on who we want to bring in for interviews, which is a more traditional process at that point. We also look for things like well-roundedness. Have they been in a band, on a sports team, have they volunteered in their community, have they taught something to someone, because we're looking for well-rounded individuals in the program.

● (1735)

Mr. Dan Ruimy: What does that typically cost, and who pays for it?

Ms. Andrea Ross: I talked about some of these in my speech. The salary or the tuition of the student is paid by Shopify. As well, there are other perks. They receive a MacBook Pro to use for their studies and their work. We have other perks for employees at Shopify like breakfast and lunch, and these kinds of things.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: I have two quick last questions. Are you able to access any government grants? What is the follow-up like? Do you have any track records? Once they've graduated and finished a program, are they staying with Shopify, or are they moving on?

Ms. Andrea Ross: I'll answer the latter question first. The program is into its third year now, so nobody has graduated from the program yet. But so far we have retained everyone, which is great, also unprecedented for computer science. We do hope to either retain them in Shopify or retain them in Canada. We consider it a win if they end up staying in the Canadian technology ecosystem.

I apologize, your first question was...?

Mr. Dan Ruimy: Are you able to access any grants?

Ms. Andrea Ross: As of yet, we have not received any government support for dev degree.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: Thank you very much

The Chair: Madame Sansoucy, you have five minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank all the witnesses for their presentations. They will really help us in our work.

My first question is for you, Mr. Cash. I am using this opportunity to tell you that I am happy to be able to have a discussion with you. I have been a member of Parliament since 2015, and I have a great deal of respect for NDP members who have shown me the way.

In your presentation, you talked about how much the labour market has changed and said that there has been an explosion in the number of independent workers, without us seizing the opportunity to adapt based on our various social security nets. When you talk to us about that indicator of job quality, do you think it's the first step in a major overhaul of our social protection systems?

[*English*]

Mr. Andrew Cash: Independent workers who are outside the standard employee-employer relationship don't have access to our social safety net. They don't have access to employment insurance. They don't have access to parental leave or sick leave or any of the benefits housed within the employer-employee relationship. In other words, if you are working on contract, if you are freelance, if you are an entrepreneur, if you're a micro-entrepreneur, then you have no protections under Canada's labour laws, really, and the provincial labour laws and standards specifically around work. You are not officially an employee.

So for those who don't have access to a sick day, we have to ask this question: how do we respond, from a social policy perspective, to the changing nature of work? It necessitates our looking at the millions of Canadian workers today—and the many more tomorrow—who fall outside the social safety net that is predicated on a full-time job or a job that is housed within the employer-employee relationship.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Okay.

That's without taking into account all those with a precarious job. We know that six workers out of 10 have a precarious job and don't have access to employment insurance. You reminded us that those workers also have families, but that they don't have access to a parental leave program, or that they are young people with a significant student debt.

Based on your experience and your knowledge of the labour market for young people, how could we at the federal level help them have a stable job that would enable them to earn a living? And how, with the measures and programs in place, can we guide them to ensure that things are going well on the labour market and that they can have access to employment insurance? What can we do in the context of this new labour market reality?

● (1740)

[*English*]

Mr. Andrew Cash: There's no one single answer, but let's start with student debt. We have to ask ourselves this question: is it counterproductive, at the very least, to have both our federal and provincial governments making money off student debt? That seems to go right against the goals of what we're studying here in this committee. I think that would be number one. Again, we are building programs, experiential programs, where young people are working for free. Even though they're connected to post-secondary institutions, and they're viable programs, really, in today's context, students are really struggling.

As I said in my remarks, students are workers already. Some of them are working full time while they're still going to school. They're trying to juggle an unpaid co-op placement within the context of their lives, which are pressurized in a way that I think we have a hard time understanding. We think of students as we used to think of students: you go to school for four years, you're focused full time, and you do nothing else but your school work. I mean, there are students who have that access, and that's awesome, but the majority of students today, in cities like Toronto, are facing enormous pressure.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: I have one last question.

[*English*]

The Chair: Sorry, that's time.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: In that case, here is my request.

Given Mr. Cash's experience with independent workers, I had a question on temporary employment agencies. I think that can be relevant to our study. May I give the question to the clerk, so that Mr. Cash can answer it later?

[*English*]

The Chair: Of course.

I believe there are a number of questions around the table. I know our side has a few questions. The analyst is also going to follow up on a few clarification questions.

I thank you all for being here. Just so it's clear for everybody, anybody can submit questions to the clerk. We will get them to you, and we look forward to those answers. Thank you very much for being here.

We do need to suspend to go to some committee business this evening, but I want to thank you for being here and helping us with this study.

We will suspend.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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